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# **District Quality Review: Report**

Stamford Public Schools

April 27, 2017



**Information class: Standard**

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# The Cambridge Education Strategic Planning Process

## Cambridge Education's Approach: Focused Improvement Planning

Stamford Public Schools (SPS) has collaborated with Cambridge Education to develop and help implement a long-term strategic plan. Fundamentally, a strategic plan is a guide to getting important things done with a sense of urgency and an eye to sustainability. Cambridge's Focused Improvement Planning (FIP) process supports districts in transforming their work and dramatically increasing student learning outcomes. There are several fundamental principles underlying this approach to FIP:

- The process is grounded in a cycle of continuous improvement, informed by data, driven by results, and focused on implementation of a small number of high-leverage, strategic objectives.
- The process requires time, attention, and commitment and should be a central part of district leaders' daily work.
- Regular monitoring of progress and accountability is focused on student outcomes.
- Collaboration between and among stakeholders at the central office and in all the schools is required for accelerated and sustained improvement.
- The process requires a culture of professional openness and honesty and a willingness to make mid-course corrections based on a continuous analysis of data.

Cambridge Education's approach to Focused Improvement Planning differs from traditional improvement plans. Where traditional planning processes tend to be static and focused on compliance (created at the beginning of the year and reviewed every twelve months), Cambridge Education's research-based planning methodology is collaborative, focused on outcomes, and dynamic – plans are continually reviewed and adjusted based on progress, experience, and interim results. Throughout this process, we engage all stakeholders at various points to contribute to the mission, vision, theory of action, strategy asset mapping, and other long-term planning processes, resulting in a collaborative plan to drive the day-to-day operations of SPS. As with all effective planning, it is essential to have a deep understanding of the elements within the organization that are having the greatest impact and to identify elements that hinder growth. One important source of data is the Cambridge Education District Quality Review (DQR) Report.

## Reviewing strengths and areas for improvement: The District Quality Review process

The District Quality Review (DQR) process engages district leaders in a process of reflection and review. In collaboration with the SPS Superintendent and other SPS leaders, we select criteria and make modifications in response to the SPS context. The process focuses on the effectiveness of the district to meet the learning needs of students and all stakeholders.

The DQR informs the development of a district plan and suggests benchmarks for evaluation. Research supports that districts that undergo thorough analysis of data and information make better decisions about what to change and how to institutionalize systemic change.

Cambridge Education’s DQR process helps school districts understand how their actions, culture, structures, and policies affect student learning and school performance. The DQR process provides a shared understanding of what is working and what could work more effectively in the district. This provides a foundation for us to collaboratively build the long-term strategic plan and implement high-leverage strategies. To provide these insights, the DQR reviewers focus on six core domains:

### The DQR Domains

**Domain 1** Student learning and development outcomes

**Domain 2** Leadership, management, and accountability

**Domain 3** Curriculum, instruction, and assessment

**Domain 4** Engagement of families, the community, and other stakeholders

**Domain 5** Human and fiscal resources

**Domain 6** Operational systems

The three-stage review process includes preparation (customization of rubric indicators and district self-evaluation), on-site review, and post-review feedback. A transparent process enables stakeholders to understand the evidence used in reviewer judgments.

During the DQR, evidence is gathered through a variety of sources to determine the current impact of the district in supporting the work of the schools. The DQR onsite review includes a feedback session, providing SPS district leaders with an overview of the findings. The on-site feedback is followed by a full report (provided herein), detailing the main factors that impact the quality of support being provided to schools, a section for each of the above six domains, and a table indicating how SPS scored against all the criteria in the DQR rubric. This final report provides the foundation for the Focused Improvement Planning process.

# Executive summary of the Cambridge District Quality Review (DQR)

Cambridge Education's District Quality Review (DQR) is a systematic review of school and district practices, processes, and systems in order to assist the Stamford Public Schools' (SPS) district leadership to determine district strengths and needs, examine its nature and causes, and set priorities for future action. The DQR is intended to provide administrators and Board of Education members with a comprehensive report of findings and recommendations in order to design and implement a long-term strategic plan. The review and resulting plan will cover a five year period from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022.

In a DQR, a Cambridge-SPS team gathers evidence through interviews, focus group meetings, direct observation and data analysis. A tailored rubric uses criteria and indicators over six overarching domains to rate the system and reveal impact on student learning and school performance. Each domain is evaluated against the four levels of performance: High Impact (4), Moderate Impact (3), Limited Evidence of Impact (2) and Low or Lack of Impact (1). The chart below summarizes Cambridge's evaluation of SPS in each domain.

Domain	Score
<b>Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes</b>	2
<b>Domain 2: Leadership, Management and Accountability</b>	2
<b>Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment</b>	2
<b>Domain 4: Engagement of Families and the Community</b>	3
<b>Domain 5: Human and Fiscal Resources</b>	2
<b>Domain 6: Operational Systems</b>	2

## Main Findings That Support District Effectiveness:

- The district has provided successful targeted support to English Language learners by providing professional development for ELL strategies to all teachers and school-based administrators in the past two years. (Domain 1)
- The Stamford Board of Education and central office senior leadership are supportive of a shared value that all students can achieve academic and social success. (Domain 2)
- There is access to a broad curriculum for students at all levels. Instructional Data Teams (IDTs) and Focus Walks promote greater understanding of the quality of instruction and the implementation of agreed polices. (Domain 3)
- SPS engages in community problem-solving and collective impact with the United Way's Stamford Cradle-to-Career Initiative (SC2C) where large numbers of community members work on the STRIVE Together Framework. (Domain 4)
- SPS has established hiring and fiscal practices and processes that ensure sound human resources and financial management. (Domain 5)
- Teachers are increasing their use of technology for instructional purposes with interactive whiteboards, computer labs, Chromebooks and document cameras. (Domain 6)

## Main Findings That Limit District Effectiveness:

- There is evidence of some academic growth over time but it is too recent to be securely embedded, and therefore there is limited data to show that academic achievement is accelerating across the full achievement range at all levels. (Domain 1)
- The district often functions as individual departments and schools rather than a whole school system, an inconsistency that impacts student success across the district. (Domain 2)
- There is no lead administrator at the central office level to ensure Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (CI&A) is updated, vertically aligned, enacted with and monitored for fidelity. (Domain 3)
- District-wide expectations for two-way engagement of families and community that support the teaching, learning and transition of students are not clear and there is significant variation in the level of engagement from school to school. (Domain 4)
- District implementation changes to the Professional Growth, Development and Evaluation (PGDE) Model results in an evaluation system that is time consuming and confounding to professional growth. (Domain 5)
- The roles and responsibilities of many district positions are neither clearly defined nor always matched to the current needs of the district. (Domain 5)
- Evidence of systems, processes and procedures around the use of data that are differentiated by department is limited. (Domain 6)
- Many of the operations rely on individuals as opposed to documented and effective operational systems. This permeates all levels of district work and creates unnecessary barriers to improving student outcomes. (Domain 6)

## Recommendations for System-Wide Effectiveness

- Build a system that is united by a common vision and mission, as well as values, goals and indicators of academic success for all. (Domains 1,2,4,6)
- Develop a district-wide approach to support the social and emotional needs of all students based on equity of educational outcomes, rather than equality of inputs. (Domains 1,4,5)
- Create a comprehensive and differentiated professional development plan for all teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff to address the unique needs of struggling learners. (Domains 1,3,5)
- Develop a guaranteed, viable district-wide curriculum (including co-curricular and enrichment programming), for instruction and assessment in all subjects that is properly vertically aligned and enacted throughout the district. (Domains 2,3,5)
- Create operational and communication systems, processes and procedures around the collection and use of qualitative and quantitative data/feedback that include all departments, including the IT and research teams. (Domains 2,3,6)
- Develop data systems and dashboards that measure the impact of initiatives, policies, and the work of each Department to ensure that district goals are being met and work is aligned to be effective and efficient. (Domains 1,2,3,4,5,6)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the district revisions and implementation of the state-approved evaluation system of district school leaders, teachers and staff. (Domains 1,2,5)
- Revise organizational structure and job descriptions to address the needs of the district, support core processes and strategies, clearly define the decision-makers, and reallocate resources to ensure people with the appropriate skills are in the right roles. (Domains 1,2,3,5)
- Establish effective and timely two-way communication systems among SPS faculty, students, parents, community and the Board of Education and ensure that all stakeholders have feedback and problem solving opportunities throughout the district that are efficiently and effectively supported by human and fiscal resources. (Domains 4,6)

# 1 Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

**Rating: Limited Evidence of Impact**

## Overview

SPS provides a wide a range of educational programs across its 21 schools. Students at all levels – preschool, elementary, middle, and high – have access to a broad curriculum that includes art, music, and physical education. There are also specialized programs, such as International Baccalaureate (IB), Information Technology (IT), STEM, and interdisciplinary magnet schools, and entry to some of these involves a lottery. In addition, an Integrated Preschool Program, held at Apples Early Childhood Centers, provides classes that integrate developing special needs students and like-age peers. Preschool programs are in place in three of the Stamford schools.

## 1.1 Student Learning and Development Outcomes Practices That Support District Effectiveness

Due to the transition across the state from mandated Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMT) to Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) testing at the elementary and middle school levels, and from SBAC to SAT at the high school level, there is limited longitudinal test data. However, there are some data points that demonstrate that students in the district are showing **some academic growth in meeting high academic standards** [1.1.1 continual academic growth](#)

- In 2015 – 16, the percent of students in grades K – 3 scoring at Benchmark on the mClass Reading Assessment increased from 59% at the start of the school year to 68% at the end of the school year. At the same time, the percent scoring Well Below Benchmark decreased from 27% to 18%.
- By grade, gains in the percent of students proficient on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in English Language Arts, increased from Spring 2015 to Spring 2016 in grade 3 (from 44% to 49%) and increased in math in grade 3 (from 42% to 48%), 7 (from 39% to 43%), and 8 (from 34% to 39%).
- On the Spring 2016 Smarter Balanced Assessment, the growth of cohorts of students from grades 3 – 7 in spring 2015 to grades 4 – 8 in Spring 2016 is similar to growth outcomes statewide.

**TABLE 1: Smarter Balanced Assessment Spring 2015**

	Growth Rate	Avg % Target Achieved
<b>ELA Stamford</b>	41.7%	63.0%
<b>ELA State</b>	43.1%	63.8%
<b>Math Stamford</b>	39.8%	61.1%
<b>Math State</b>	43.9%	65.0%

- The number of high school students participating in AP courses has increased from 894 in Spring 2012 to 975 in Spring 2016. The percentage of SPS students taking AP courses has also increased (see Table 3).
- High School Graduation rates in SPS have increased from the Class of 2011 at 85.3% to 87.5% for the Class of 2016. Graduation rates have increased for all racial/ethnic student groups.

### The district is making some strides in closing the achievement gap [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

The Connecticut State Department of Education Next Generation Accountability Report for all schools and districts provides valuable achievement data, disaggregated for High-Needs (EL, Special Needs, and Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch Program) and Non-High Needs students.

On the overall index included in the Next Generation Accountability Report, Stamford Public Schools ranked first within the District Reference Group (DRG) H in 2015-16 and second behind Norwalk in 2014-15. In both years, Stamford was the only district in DRG H in which the difference in graduation rates between High-Needs and Non-High Needs students fell in single percentage points.

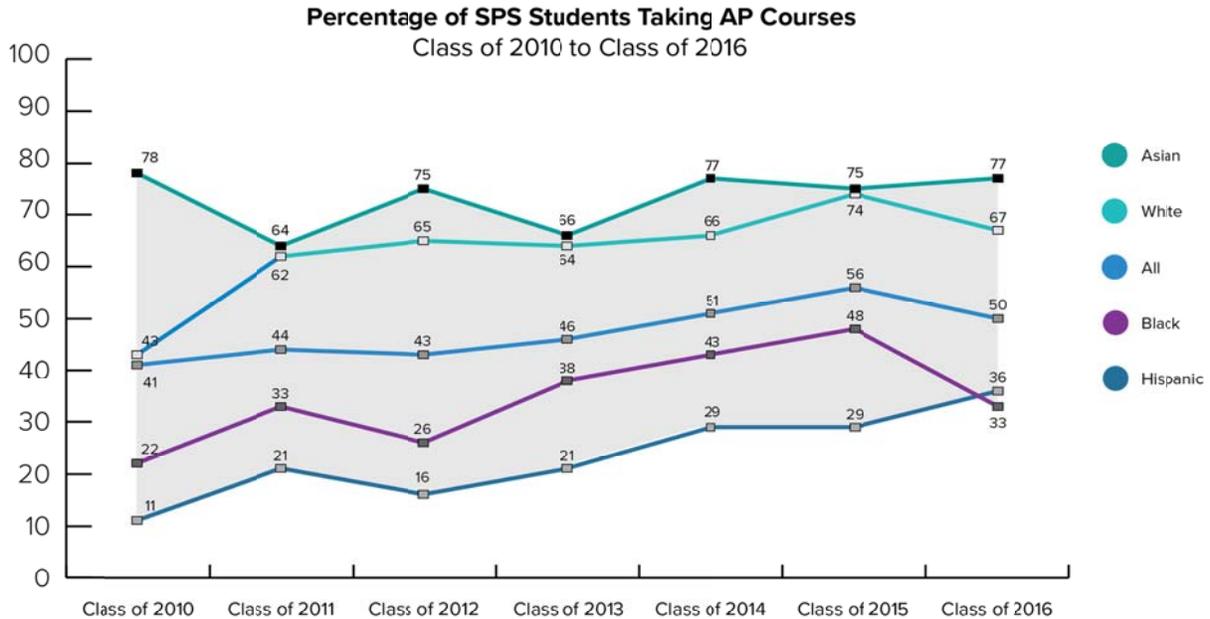
**TABLE 2: Connecticut State Department of Education Next Generation Accountability Report, 2015-2016: DRG H extract**

DRG H Districts	% Points	Graduation Rates (2013 Cohort)			State Gap mean + 1 Standard deviation
		Non- High Needs Rate	High Needs Rate	Size of Gap	
<b>Stamford PS</b>	73.0%	94.0%	87.3%	<b>6.7%</b>	15.3%
Norwalk	72.7%	94.0%	81.1%	<b>12.9%</b>	15.3%
Danbury	72.6%	94.0%	78.5%	<b>15.5%</b>	15.3%
West Haven	69.4%	89.9%	66.6%	<b>23.3%</b>	15.3%
Meriden	66.6%	93.8%	68.2%	<b>25.6%</b>	15.3%
Ansonia	65.7%	94.0%	79.6%	<b>14.4%</b>	15.3%
East Hartford	64.9%	93.8%	81.9%	<b>11.9%</b>	15.3%
Derby	63.0%	94.0%	77.4%	<b>16.6%</b>	15.3%
Norwich*	62.3%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

\*Norwich – 62.3% represents the fact that they achieved 654.4 point out of a maximum on 1050 points  
Source - Connecticut State Department of Education Next Generation Report 2015-2016

The **percentage of SPS students in the district taking Advanced Placement (AP)** courses has increased from 41% in 2010 to 50% in 2016, with the number of Black and Hispanic students participating in AP courses increasing by double digits across these years. [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

**TABLE 3: Percentage of SPS Students Taking AP Courses**



Notes: Includes all graduates who had an AP final grade recorded.  
 The percentage of SPS students taking AP courses increased from 41% in 2010 to 56% in 2015.  
 Black and Hispanic students participating in AP courses doubled across these years.

Achievement gaps for Stamford with regard to the participation of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders in College and Career Coursework are lower than gaps statewide. [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

**TABLE 4: 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Graders Enrolled in College-and-Career-Readiness Courses During High School**

**11th and 12th Graders Enrolled in College-and-Career-Readiness Courses during High School<sup>3</sup>**

	11th		12th	
	Count	Rate (%)	Count	Rate (%)
Black or African American	196	81.7	199	79.0
Hispanic or Latino	352	77.5	325	81.7
White	381	90.1	362	86.4
English Learners	71	55.9	63	56.8
Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals	442	79.2	376	80.5
Students with Disabilities	115	71.9	96	56.5
District	1,009	83.9	955	83.1
State		61.2		73.9

<sup>3</sup>College-and-Career-Readiness Courses include Advanced Placement®(AP), International Baccalaureate®(IB), Career and Technical Education(CTE), workplace experience and dual enrollment courses.

## The district provides successful targeted support to English Language Learners (EL)

### 1.1.4 support EL

The Language Assessment Scale (LAS), a measure of students' oral and written proficiency in English, is scored on a scale of 1 (Beginning) to 4/5 (Proficient). The percent of EL students scoring at levels 4 or 5 increases with the number of years in an EL program – from 12% for elementary students in Year 1 to 35% in Year 3 or more; from 14% for middle school students to 36%; and from 7% for high school students to 23%.

**TABLE 5: LAS LINKS SCORES 2016**

Elementary LAS Level						
Year	1	2	3	4	5	% Proficient
1	33	28	28	10	2	12%
2	16	23	31	23	6	29%
3+	20	24	21	28	7	35%
Middle LAS Level						
Year	1	2	3	4	5	% Proficient
1	65	11	10	10	4	14%
2	35	27	31	8	0	8%
3+	21	13	29	22	14	36%
High School LAS Level						
Year	1	2	3	4	5	% Proficient
1	76	8	10	6	1	7%
2	39	27	24	9	0	9%
3+	24	17	36	19	4	23%

The district has programs that enable the schools to create learning environments that actively promote the personal, social, and emotional development of all students. [1.2.1 developmental environment.](#)

In the 2016 Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), students gave the highest ratings to safety rules and norms, respect for diversity, and caring adult relationships. [1.2.1 developmental environment.](#)

The district suspension/expulsion rate (3.7%) is lower than the State average (7.0%) Source - Connecticut State Department of Education Next Generation Report 2015-2016. [1.2.1 developmental environment.](#)

SPS has developed a variety of programs through operating budget and grant funding that targets students' academic and emotional development. [1.2.2 personal/social support systems.](#) Some examples are:

- Orton Gillingham training for K-3 instructors
- Fully implemented SRBI at the elementary level
- Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)
- RULER through Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence
- Responsive Classroom
- Advisory Connection Time
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Afterschool Programs at four schools (1 elementary and 3 middle)
- Algebra 1 and Geometry programs in middle schools
- Early College Experience (ECE) courses in multiple disciplines
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- A pilot SRBI process at secondary level

- Early College program, which is scheduled for implementation in fall of 2017.
- English Learner (EL) Strategy workshops
- AP Teacher Summer Institutes
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)
- Aspiring Leadership Through Action (ALTA)
- After School Titans (State funded afterschool program)
- Project Open Doors
- Upward Bound

Students and parents reported that they value the use of technology in classes, especially software coding instruction taken either as part of the day schedule or as an after school extra-curricular activity. [1.2.2 personal/social support systems](#).

District-level staff shared in focus groups a number of initiatives currently underway at the district-level to provide more training and support to schools in managing social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. For instance, last year training was provided to staff on cognitive behavior interventions for trauma in schools (CBITS) and a comprehensive mental health plan for the district is currently being developed. [1.2.2 social emotional development](#)

## 1.2 Student Learning and Development Outcomes Practices That Limit District Effectiveness

On the Smarter Balanced Assessment in ELA and math, the percent of students who meet proficiency benchmarks varies by grade. [1.1.1 academic growth](#)

**TABLE 6: Percent of SPS Students, Grades 3-8. Achieving at/above Proficiency in ELA and Math**

**On Smarter Balanced Assessment by Grade Spring 2015 and Spring 2016**

Grade	ELA			Math		
	2015	2016	Diff	2015	2016	Diff
3	44.4	49.2	+4	41.7	48.4	+6.7
4	47.0	47.2	+.2	41.8	41.5	-.3
5	54.9	53.9	-1.0	40.8	37.2	-3.6
6	53.5	48.5	-5.0	39.1	36.2	-2.9
7	55.0	50.6	-4.4	38.8	43.0	+4.2
8	49.2	49.1	-.1	34.4	38.6	+4.2
Total	49.1	49.7	+.6	36.9	41.0	+4.1

**TABLE 7: Percent of SPS students by Cohort, Achieving At/above Proficient in ELA and Math On Smarter Balanced Spring 2015 and Spring 2016**

Grade	ELA			Math		
	2015	2016	Diff	2015	2016	Diff
3 → 4	44.4	47.2	+2.8	41.7	41.5	-.2
4 → 5	47.0	53.9	+6.9	41.8	37.2	-4.6
5 → 6	54.9	48.5	-6.4	40.8	36.2	-4.6
6 → 7	53.5	50.6	-2.9	39.1	43.0	+3.9
7 → 8	55.0	49.1	-5.9	38.8	38.6	-.2

Overall results of the Spring 2016 Smarter Balanced Assessment for SPS administered to students are slightly below state results in grades 3-8 in ELA and math. [1.1.1 academic growth](#)

**TABLE 8: Percent of Students, Grades 3-8 at/above State Proficiency Standards  
In ELA and Math, Spring 2016 Stamford and State Percent At/above Proficiency Standards**

	Stamford	State
ELA	49.7	55.6
Math	41.0	44.0

The SAT is now used in place of the Smarter Balanced Assessment for 11<sup>th</sup> graders, reducing the test burden for high school juniors. On the first administration of the SAT in Spring 2016: [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

- 30% of SPS met the SAT benchmarks in both English Language Arts (ELA) and math in comparison to 37% statewide and 29% nationally
- 55% of SPS students met the SAT benchmark in English Language Arts (ELA) in comparison to 65% statewide and 53% nationally
- 32% of SPS students met the math benchmark in comparison to 39% statewide and 31% nationally
- Achievement gaps in the percent of students meeting SAT benchmarks between High-Needs students and Non-High Needs students are similar to results statewide.

**TABLE 9: District and State SAT scores for High Needs and Non-High Needs**

	ELA			MATH		
	High-Needs	Non-High Needs	Diff	High-Needs	Non-High Needs	Diff
<b>SPS</b>	36	78	+42	13	55	+42
<b>State</b>	37	82	+45	15	55	+40

The CDSE 2015-16 Next Generation Accountability Report demonstrates that Stamford is a gap outlier in ELA, Math, and Science performance: [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

**TABLE 10: 2015-2016 Next Generation Accountability Report in ELA, Math, and Science**

Gap Indicators	Non-High Needs Rate*	High Needs Rate	Size of Gap	State Gap Mean + 1 Stdev**	Is Gap an Outlier?
Achievement Gap Size Outlier?					Y
ELA Performance Index Gap	75.0	57.3	17.7	16.5	
Math Performance Index Gap	73.1	51.3	21.8	18.9	
Science Performance Index Gap	64.6	45.8	18.7	17.2	

#### AP Participation:

Although students have access to a wide range of programs, there is a diversity gap in many classes, most notably the AP courses. Advanced Placement and honors classes are inconsistently representative of the school's student population. For example, in 2016, AP enrollment was: 67% White; 22%, Hispanic; 12%, Asian; 11% Black; and <1%. Multi-Racial. However, only 33.4% of the high school student population was White, with 66.6% minority, including 40% Hispanic. [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

#### High School Graduation

High school graduation rates for Black or African American students and Hispanic students lag behind those of their White and Asian peers. Graduation rates for EL and Special Needs students are also low as seen in Table 11 below: [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

**TABLE 11: Class of 2016, Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate by Student Group**

Group	Graduation Rate
Asian	94.6
Black	86.7
Hispanic	81.3
White	93.5
EL	72.3
Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	82.8
Special Needs	73.3
All Students	87.5

The four-year cohort graduation rate represents the percentage of first time 9<sup>th</sup> graders who earn a standard high school diploma within four years. For the Class of 2016, the four-year graduation rate for Stamford at 87.4% slightly exceeds the four-year graduation rate statewide at 87.2%. [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

In addition to achievement gaps on the Smarter Balanced Assessments, the SAT, and the four-year high school graduation rate, the 2015-16 CSDE Next Generation Accountability Report shows SPS lagging behind the state in two key indicators: Chronic Absenteeism and Preparation for College and Career (CCR). While participation of SPS students in Advanced Placement courses is high, achievement on Advanced Placement exams lags. [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

**TABLE 12: SPS Next Generation Accountability Report Chronic Absenteeism and CCR 2015-16**

Indicator	Index Rate	Target	State Average Index Rate
Chronic Absenteeism – All Students	11.7%	< = 5%	9.6%
Chronic Absenteeism –High Needs Students	14.6%	< = 5%	15.6%
Preparation for College and Career (CCR) - % passing exams	33.9%	75%	40.7%

#### Focus Group Comments on Teaching and Learning

Not all teachers are provided with sufficient job-embedded professional development and coaching on the effective implementation of the Connecticut Core Standards, so teachers are not all able to adapt and modify lesson plans to meet the needs of individual students. [1.1.4 EL academic standards](#)

During focus groups and interviews, it was shared that not all Stamford elementary school teachers feel fully equipped and empowered to provide high-quality literacy instruction to all students. [1.1.3 achievement gaps](#)

- “All teachers in the elementary school are reading teachers, but many do not have this knowledge base.”
- “The majority of elementary teachers struggle to teach reading.”
- “Teachers are not adapting to meet the needs of students.”
- “Teachers are still learning to adjust instruction to meet student needs.”
- A common theme heard in focus groups was a need for district-wide clarification and guidelines regarding the core literacy curriculum.

Many schools in Stamford Public Schools employ a tiered system of supports based on the SRBI model. A district-developed SRBI handbook outlines the processes and tools teachers can use throughout the SRBI process; however, it was reported this this was a vastly underutilized resource. As a result, focus groups and interviews revealed that the implementation fidelity of the SRBI process differs greatly from school to school. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)

Staff indicated that often this is not due to a lack of willingness or desire to support struggling students. Rather, teachers feeling as though they have insufficient skills, resources, and guidelines to meet the needs of all students. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)

At the school-level, staff in DMC focus groups and interviews noted there is inconsistency in the district with regard to the model of behavioral supports. At the elementary level, schools use a variety of different programs, including the Ruler program, responsive classroom, and Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS). Moreover, staff expressed that for those elementary schools using the PBIS model, often the focus is primarily on Tier 1 level supports and the fidelity of implementing the PBIS model can be “hit or miss” depending on the principal and school-based leadership. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)

A common sentiment in focus groups and interviews was that staff often feel ill-equipped to handle the diverse social-emotional needs of students: [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)

- “While school-based social, emotional, and behavioral support staff [is] skilled at conducting behavior assessments and developing student behavior intervention plans, they struggle with implementing and monitoring.”
- “Often teachers believe special education is the option because it is perceived that other social, emotional, or behavioral supports are not available.”
- “The [number] of students with social-emotional needs at the secondary level is overwhelming.”
- Not all students who struggle receive sufficient additional time in targeted interventions.
- There are limited direct-service social, emotional, and behavioral supports.
- The IEP compliance teachers in SPS have a wide range of responsibilities and have to cover multiple schools. This has a negative impact on their ability to effectively support each school they serve.
- A significant percentage of EL students have not met proficiency in English in three years

Behavioral/ social-emotional support roles currently spend less than half their time working with students, on average. In DMC focus groups, staff repeatedly stressed a need for additional services to address the growing social-emotional and mental health needs of students. Staff shared that in many cases social-emotional support staff were unable to accommodate all students who may benefit from additional support due to limited capacity in their schedules. It is not uncommon for the indirect responsibilities that are requested of staff to be scheduled first, with student counseling inadvertently becoming second priority in whatever time is left over. Additionally, many staff expressed the sentiment that they are constantly in a reactive state responding to student social-emotional crises, leaving little time for preventative care and wellness checks. [1.2.1 social emotional development](#)

### **SRBI Framework**

At the elementary level, many, but not all schools have an SRBI process in place to provide additional supports to students who struggle in reading. However, the lack of a coordinated district-wide approach for SRBI interventions has resulted in school-based models with some differing supports for struggling students. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)

One challenge to developing a district-wide SRBI framework at the secondary level is a lack of clarity regarding school-level ownership of SRBI. In contrast to the elementary level, there is no school-based individual at the secondary level, such as an SRBI teacher, to monitor the SRBI process. It was shared that secondary schools with more robust SRBI processes are those

where SRBI is initiated and owned by principals, who are able to make innovative use of their existing staff and resources. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)

**Unclear curriculum and instruction leadership** contributes to stagnant academic progress. Reductions in the numbers of central office staff and competing priorities for decreasing financial resources have resulted in short term fixes. These changes have negatively affected Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CI&A) with the elimination of a Deputy Superintendent position charged with overseeing CI&A, as well as the elimination of the Directors of Math, Literacy, and EL. Despite the EL professional development training provided for all staff, the district does not have enough human capacity to lead, plan, and support an effective EL program to meet the increasing level of demand. [1.1.1 academic standards](#)

Cambridge noted that during the week of the DQR there were 40+ new arrivals entering Stamford Public Schools. The new arrivals classes have been at maximum capacity since at the start of the year. [1.1.4 EL](#)

### 1.3 Recommendations for High Impact of Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Continuously raise the level of achievement in all schools and narrow the achievement gaps between schools by:

- Ensuring students at all levels continue to progress to meet high academic standards [1.1.1 academic growth](#)
- Providing targeted job-embedded professional development and coaching for elementary and secondary teachers to enable them to become highly effective teachers of reading, particularly for struggling students. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)
- Identifying and sharing best practices for special education. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)
- Developing a standards-based professional development program for all teachers and para-educators so they have a shared understanding of, and implementation strategies for, identified best practice. [.1.3 achievement gaps](#)
- Providing support to school-based education staff, so that more time is spent directly supporting students. [.1.3 achievement gaps](#)
- Reviewing and revising the role of school-based compliance teachers, to enable them to be more responsive to parents' needs, and providing more effective instruction. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)
- Building upon the existing SRBI program by embedding a system of support that addresses the needs of ALL students, and ensures that students who struggle receive additional targeted interventions. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)
- Ensuring that the staff who provide interventions for students with mild-to-moderate special needs are well trained and have deep content expertise. [1.1.4 students with disabilities](#)
- Developing a district-wide approach to supporting the social and emotional needs of all students that includes resources (such as the psychologist, counselors, and social workers) based on equity of educational outcomes, rather than equality of inputs. [1.2.2 personal/social support systems.](#)

## 2 Domain 2: Leadership, Management, and Accountability

**Rating: Limited Evidence of Impact**

### Overview

SPS values the recent changes that have occurred in the district and board leadership, and there is a sense of hope that they are laying down the foundation for positive change within the district. While the long-range vision and five-year plan to drive improvement across SPS is being developed, the superintendent has established five goals for the 2016-17 school year. These are:

- Articulate expectations, through goals and targets, for high levels of achievement and attainment for all students.
- Expand capacity to continuously improve teaching and leadership practice.
- Set a vision for family and caregiver understanding of, and engagement in, PK-16 school systems.
- Establish a process for the continuous assessment of curricula, instruction, and assessment.
- Engage community in the development of a shared vision and strategic plan to realize the community's vision for our students, staff, supporters, and schools.

### 2.1 Leadership, Management & Accountability Practices That Support District Effectiveness

#### Culture: Shared values of high expectations 2.2.1

- District office leaders promote a shared value that all students can achieve academic and social success. They are aware of the challenges schools face, especially with struggling students. They are in the process of investigating why all students are not hitting academic benchmarks and how the district can better support schools, students, and families to improve learning outcomes for all students.
- The new superintendent is leading the district in a strategic and purposeful manner. All stakeholders agree that he has identified the necessary changes and acknowledged that his "Go Slow to Go Fast" approach has brought a much-needed period of stability across the district. He is very approachable and eager to listen to staff, students, parents, and community members.
- Over the past several years, SPS has reduced tracking in the middle schools (moving from 5-6 instructional level groups to two: college prep and honors. Concurrently, low level courses in the high schools have been eliminated.
- The Lighthouse survey suggests on average teachers and leaders believe all children can achieve/learn at high levels. (itemBQ52)

#### Vision

- Over the past 5 years SPS has received approximately \$12 million in CDSE Alliance funding. This grant requires the 30 lowest performing districts to describe specific work, with indicators of success in four areas: Academics, Talent, Climate, and Operations. The Alliance goals have served as district goals and informed district efforts as well as School Improvement Plans, written annually by staff at each elementary, middle, and high school [2.2.2 district improvement goals](#)

#### Assessment and use of data

- A structure exists for a coherent analysis of performance outcomes. A district data team with two representatives from each school meets monthly. Each school has a School Data team and Instructional Data Team at each grade (elementary) or discipline (secondary). [2.2.3 data informed systems](#)
- Lighthouse Survey item (C5Q24) --respondents across all stakeholder groups agree that district decisions must be based on data. [2.2.3 data informed systems](#)
- Lighthouse Survey item (C2Q13)—respondents reported that district improvement goals are based on data and improvement of student learning.

## Governance

- The Board of Education meeting begins with the reading of the current Mission Statement to focus the meeting on the work of the school district, “To prepare each and every student for higher education and success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” [2.3.1 leadership high expectation for learning](#)
- The Board of Education (BoE) committees for Teaching and Learning, Policy, Operations, Labor, Finance and Family and Community Engagement meet monthly. Issues are discussed, resolved, then summarized at full Board meetings, which occur monthly. The BoE is currently working with the Lighthouse Project to clarify roles and responsibilities of the Board. [2.3.1 leadership high expectation for learning](#)
- The superintendent’s cabinet meets every other week with agendas dedicated to policies, procedures, and budget [2.3.1 leadership high expectation for learning](#)
- The BOE, in partnership with the superintendent and senior leadership, is engaging in the Lighthouse Project, to clarify roles and responsibilities of the Board and staff. [2.3.2 BOE prepared to guide](#)
- Once a month, the Board meeting includes “Time for the Public to be Heard” where a community member is given three minutes to address the Board on issues of concern. [2.3.2 BOE prepared to guide](#)

## Accountability

- The district is currently beginning to review the major processes and routines included in the APQC’s Process Classification Framework<sup>®</sup>(PCF). Used worldwide, it creates a common language for organizations to communicate and define work processes comprehensively and without redundancies. Organizations are using it to support benchmarking, manage content, and perform other important performance management activities. [2.4.1 accountability all departments](#)

## Structure: [2.5.1 Effective leadership to support learning](#)

- Two assistant superintendents, one for elementary and one for secondary schools, support building principals and their teams
- In the past two years, the position of Administrative Intern has been restored. This position provides much needed additional capacity at the school leadership level, and historically has served as a pipeline for home-grown leadership; many assistant principals have been selected from among the Administrative Interns.

## Professional Capacity of Office Staff: [Schools report that they have positive and supportive interactions with district office personnel. 2.6.2](#)

- As observed, district office staff has good relationships and interact with each other in professional and respectful ways. The newly established Cabinet works well as a group, and is generally diligent about gathering input from teachers and administrative unions. School administrators feel confident they have someone at the district level they can contact when they have questions or concerns.
- Although there has been much change, all stakeholders report that they value the expertise, experience, and interpersonal skills of the Assistant Superintendents for Elementary and Secondary Schools. Principals feel more supported now than they have been. They value the monthly district-wide administration meetings and the monthly principals' meetings, including the Communities of Practice that have been established for the elementary principals, with the support of Lone Pine Foundation. At monthly Principal meetings, principals identify a "problem of practice" to share and work through with their colleagues.

## 2.2 Leadership, Management & Accountability Practices That Limit District Effectiveness

### Culture 2.1.1 leaders promote shared values

- School leaders and teachers are inconsistent with the feeling and ownership and responsibility for the achievement of ALL students. In focus groups, some staff in schools refer to "those" students when identifying the factors that limit academic achievement in their buildings.
- Lighthouse survey item (C1Q29) says staff disagree that everyone has an opportunity to become involved in decision making.

### Vision 2.1.2 well focused vision

- Although a district vision is being worked on at this time, currently decisions in the district at all levels not aligned to the current district's vision.

### Strategic planning and use of data 2.2.3 data informed systems

- In the Lighthouse survey, only 4% (17 out of 379 respondents) answered "using data" to the item, "Describe how decisions are made in the district." This is partially due to the lack of available, meaningful data in a timely manner. Consequently, accountability systems for all departments, teams, and schools are not clearly established, nor are systems for ensuring the work of departments' is aligned to district goals and that this work is impactful.
- Focus groups reported that many people in schools and at the district level continue to invest time, energy, and resources into initiatives without knowing what impact they are having. The Board launched an initiative to establish data-dashboards that are designed to accelerate data driven decision-making at every level from the classroom to the Board.

### Governance 2.3.1 school committees support a shared vision

- School governance councils are not consistently employed across the district.

### Accountability 2.4.1 accountability systems for departments

- **The district often functions as individual departments and schools rather than a coordinated/coherent school system.** This inconsistency across the district results in variations in student achievement among schools.

- Since the district’s vision and strategic planning process initiated in 2007, the central office has been significantly reduced in size, and core processes in support of strategies have not been mapped. Thus, the organizational structure is not strategic and does not meet the needs of the employees to enable them to be successful or effective in their roles toward supporting student success.
- Stakeholders reported that following the most recent reorganization at the district office, many staff members carry very high and/or poorly aligned workloads, which substantially reduces their effectiveness.
- There is a perception across schools from focus groups that there are several areas that lack the appropriate personnel to effectively conduct the work of the district. For example, in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, there is no one overarching role with responsibility for this area; the district relies on TOSAs for all subject areas except for math, where there is no district lead for this core area of work.
- In a recent survey<sup>1</sup> administered by the Connecticut Lighthouse and distributed to all SPS Board members, district leaders, building administrators, and teachers, over one third of SPS educators had little or no knowledge of how district and building leaders worked together. One respondent wrote, “It is unclear to me how they collaborate. There seems to be a lot of dissatisfaction. I have worked in this district K – 12 and the sentiment has been the same across the board.” This statement was taken from the CT Lighthouse survey (C5 Q62)—1/3<sup>rd</sup> of SPS educators rated their knowledge of how district and building work together.

### Professional capacity of the staff [2.6.1 supportive process for personnel](#)

- Administrators and teachers expressed concern that the state approved teacher evaluation process is too time consuming and too narrow in its focus. It is not viewed as either empowering effective teachers, by providing them with meaningful constructive feedback, or in enabling administrators to hold all teachers accountable for the quality of learning and the level of student development outcomes in every classroom.
- Many focus group participants and those interviewed individually stated that the contract between the district and the unions creates a roadblock for making changes that would allow the evaluation system to be more time efficient and better serve as a conduit to improve professional growth and improvement in student outcomes.

## 2.3 Recommendations for High Impact of Leadership and Management

- Develop a plan for district leaders to consistently promote and model high expectations for all students to achieve at their maximum potential. [2.2.1 shared high expectations for all](#)
- Develop a clear and well-focused vision underpinning everything it does collaboratively with all stakeholders [2.1.2 focused vision](#)
- Make decisions using current and relevant data as well as the expertise, knowledge, and experience of key district leaders. Develop data driven systems that focus the operations of the district on ensuring higher levels of student learning and staff effectiveness. [2.2.3 data informed systems](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Lighthouse District Survey results presentation: Stamford Public Schools - Studying District Culture Through Survey Data, March 2, 2017.

- Establish systems to collect relevant information and data regarding the impact of initiatives, policies, and the work of each department to ensure that district goals are being met and work is aligned to be effective and efficient. [2.2.3 data informed systems](#)
- Design and implement a district-wide initiative to train and support all staff and board members to become informed users of data. [2.2.3 data informed systems](#)
- Develop clear systems of accountability for all departments, teams, and schools. [4.2.1 accountability](#)
- Revise the organizational structures to address the needs of the district and ensure that staff with the appropriate skill sets fill these identified positions for systems accountability. [2.5.1 staff structure](#)
- Negotiate with the unions to review and revise the evaluation systems for all staff. The district should consider the changes that have occurred with the transition from NCLB to ESSA, and best practices that have been established across Connecticut, since the current system was established three years ago. [2.6.1 supportive process for personnel](#)

## 3 Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

### Rating - Limited Evidence of Impact

#### Overview

After many years of decentralization, the processes and procedures for curriculum development, designing formative assessments, and the delivery of professional development are more centralized and consistent. For example, teachers work with central office staff to develop curriculum, scope and sequence, and interim and final assessments. Formatively, the elementary schools use mClass reading and the Scholastic Math Inventory for math; secondary schools use Scholastic Reading and Scholastic math. The district works with Curriculum Associates to ensure that strategies for working with struggling students and students needing enrichment are included in the integrated literacy units. Professional Development At-A-Glance lists 2 four-day PD sessions and 3-4 early release school based PD developed by district content leaders. There is a lack of an officer responsible for providing leadership, vision, and strategic direction for SPS's academic program, standards, assessment, instruction, and curriculum.

### 3.1 CI&A Practices That Support District Effectiveness

#### Teaching and Learning – Needs of Struggling Students 3.2.2

- Elementary uses Dream Box, Ten Marks, Writing Stations, Daily3, LLI for academic interventions
- Secondary uses Read 180 (comprehension), Systems 44 (reading decoding) for literacy interventions
- All teachers are EL trained
- There is a SRBI handbook that addresses the process of tier 1, 2 and 3 interventions.
- Programs are in place to target students' social and emotional development, including Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and connection time at the middle and high school level

**Curriculum – Range of experiences 3.2.3** Students at all levels have access to a broad curriculum and a wide range of academic and social opportunities. In addition to core subjects such as English Language Arts, math, science, and social studies, also includes art, music, physical education, and a wide range specialized programs.

- Internship and capstone programs
- High school students have access to Career and Technical Education in areas such as business, marketing, family and consumer science, agriculture and computer information systems.
- Numerous programs are in place to target students' social and emotional development, including Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and an Early College program.

#### Assessment and use of data

- Elementary staff receives math and literacy data on BOY, MOY and EOY assessments through the Math Inventory DIBLES and mClass. [3.3.1 staff receives data](#)
- Data Teams use the 5-step process—chart data, pull out strengths and weaknesses, develop smart goals, define instructional strategies and results indicators [3.3.2 data collection systems](#)
- In process: The research office is working on dashboard that will capture major student/teacher outcomes on three levels: the district, whole school and school by grade

and student. With the support of SchoolNet, administrators and teachers will be able to “drill” into the appropriate level of data. [3.3.4 data use](#)

### **Systems for data monitoring and evaluation [3.3.3](#)**

- Focus Walks promote a greater understanding of the quality of instruction and a more consistent implementation of agreed policies.
- IDTs at the district and school level follow the 5-step process, to chart data, pull out strengths and weaknesses, develop SMART goals, identify instructional strategies, and set results indicators. There is a reiterative feedback loop through progress monitoring.

### **Professional staff Practices and student learning [5.3.2](#)**

- Central office staff collaborates with schools to enhance professional development to support teachers and principals. In addition, the schedule for all SPS schools includes an early-release on Wednesdays, which enables staff to meet in teams – within and across schools – on a planned cycle.
- SPS has IDT and Focus Walks that are promoting a greater understanding of the quality of instruction and the implementation of agreed policies, such as the use of writing protocols, in classes across each school.
- Everyday Math 4 is aligned to CCSS and the 8 Mathematical practices.
- Indications of the positive impact of the focus on professional development and training observed during the school site-visits included:
  - No disruptive behavior was observed in any of 44 classrooms visited during the review and virtually all students were on task.
  - In classrooms where inquiry-based learning was taking place, all students were actively engaged in learning and could explicitly answer three key questions: “What are you learning?”, “Why are you learning it?”, and “How will you know you have learned it?”

## **3.2 CI&A Practices That Limit District Effectiveness**

**Teaching and learning** - There are some practices at the district level that encourage rigor and relevance in academic standards but they are not having the needed impact on learning and teaching, and are not implemented consistently. [3.1.1 Rigorous curriculum](#)

- A discrepancy between the written curriculum and the enacted curriculum experienced by students, which was observed during classroom visits, including:
  - Teachers trying to balance the scope, sequence, and pacing of their lessons to meet the diverse needs of the students in their care and preparing their students to achieve on the interim and final assessments, which are based on a fixed scope and sequence.
  - A lack of academic discourse, rigor, and differentiation in too many classrooms as the teachers focus on content coverage.

### **Needs of struggling students [3.1.2](#)**

- Elementary teachers need targeted professional development to learn how to teach reading, particularly for struggling students.
- Classroom teachers and para-educators are challenged to differentiate instruction to meet all students’ needs.
- Some struggling students are showing some minimal gains in achievement
- There is a need to support math at middle and high school levels, particularly to support student achievement in Algebra 1.

### **Curriculum**

- The curriculum department is understaffed. For example, two teachers on special assignment (TOSA) oversee ELA and there is no leader for math. The lack of an overall district lead for the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment results in a disconnect between the written and enacted curriculum, and a lack of vertical alignment. [3.2.1](#)

- There is no overarching lead educator in science or mathematics at the district level. Teachers are unsure who to turn to for assistance. [3.2.1](#)
- Not all teachers are sufficiently knowledgeable about the Connecticut Common Core standards. [3.2.2](#)
- Little or no vertical alignment of the K-12 curriculum, especially at the critical transition stages, between elementary/middle and middle/high schools. There are no TOSAs for math. There is limited evidence to show vertical curriculum alignment from elementary to middle and middle school to high school. [3.2.2](#)
- Teachers state in focus groups that they supplement their curriculum a lot to address standards [3.2.2](#)
- Some teachers view textbooks as a course, rather than stimulating, integrated units using a developed scope and sequence. [3.2.3](#)

### Assessment and use of data

- Teachers in focus groups note that sometimes data is late and/or not easily accessible. Although there is a curriculum associate for technology at the central office, many teachers need training on applications that will help access the data. [3.3.1 staff receives data](#)
- During discussions of data in focus groups, a number of teachers and administrators acknowledged their limited understanding of how to access available data and how to use it to improve student learning. [3.3.2 systems for data collecting using](#)
- There are no systems in place to ensure that all teachers and administrators are effectively using data to make decisions. [3.3.3 systems for data monitoring and evaluation](#)
- A discrepancy between district mid-term and final assessment scores and the assessments that the state utilizes, such as Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test), and SAT scores, and core course passing rates. [3.3.4 schools make effective use of data](#)

### Instructional Leadership and Capacity [3.4.1 personnel support](#)

- The revised district-office structure has had a particularly adverse impact with the elimination of a Deputy Superintendent position charged with overseeing curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and the elimination of Directors of Math, Literacy, and ELL.
- Roles and responsibilities are vaguely defined at the district level, and schools have inconsistent support to implement programs, strategies or innovations with fidelity.
- A lack of overall support and guidance for the TOSA
- Extraneous roles and functions fall on the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary and the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary, who already have full workloads.

### Professional Development and Learning - There is inconsistency of written and enacted curriculum across the schools and subjects. [3.5.2 PD staff practices and student learning](#)

- Through focus groups and observations, it was deduced that a good number of teachers teach to the middle, which does not effectively address the needs of the gifted and talented.
- While valuing the access to professional development (PD), teachers and administrators consistently raised concerns during meetings, including:
  - Too much of the PD is generic, one size fits all. As stated by one Lighthouse survey respondent, *"The PD.... doesn't allow for personal growth and teachers expressing WHAT they need for PD."*
  - *"PD does not recognize teachers as experts"*.
  - The loss of time from travel and lunch during the early release days reduces the time available. Teachers and administrators would prefer more PD to be led by suitably skilled teachers in their own schools.
  - An apparent lack of coordinated planning has resulted in excessive numbers of staff needing substitute coverage on the same day. The limited availability and quality of substitute teachers further exacerbate this.

- These findings are also reflected in the results of the Lighthouse survey, where 60% of respondents rated the professional development undertaken in the last year had little or no impact on improving instruction.
- Teachers reported in focus groups that they felt marginalized
- Para educator Training: With the increase in ELL and struggling learners populations, classroom teachers and para-educators are challenged with differentiating the instruction to meet students' needs. SRBI is not implemented consistently or with fidelity across the district. The statement is made in different focus groups and during site visits by school administrators, district administrator, district ELL and staff members

### 3.3 Recommendations for High Impact of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- Establish a clear vision, process and policy for the continuous assessment of curricula, instruction, and assessment. [3.1.1 vision for effective learning and teaching](#)
- Building administrators have the greatest impact on improving instruction, per the Lighthouse survey results. Establish and communicate clear expectations and create a common understanding of what constitutes good learning and teaching. Conduct regular classroom observations and provide developmental feedback to teachers and administrators. [3.1.1 vision for effective learning and teaching](#)
- Establish district-wide expectations that all students will be prepared for grade level or higher-level course work upon entering high school, [3.1.1 vision for effective learning and teaching](#), through:
  - Creating transition and support programs for targeted student groups to increase access to and success in high-level coursework.
  - Maintaining a clear focus on assessment for learning by ensuring formative assessment is planned as an integral part of every student's daily learning experience
  - Exploring family and caregiver engagement programs, aimed at improving student achievement and attainment.
  - Standardizing grading and homework practices district wide so that the quality expectations for student work are consistent.
  - Aligning the curriculum vertically throughout the district so that the curriculum and skills are built year-on-year. For example, reading strategies and skills taught in one grade should be continued and built upon in the next grade.
  - Identifying existing successful practices and implementing them district-wide, using common language and strategies.
  - Focusing resources on early language arts and math literacy.
- Create and implement a plan to address the needs of the special education program using the "Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Supports for Struggling Students" final report. The plan should include ways to ensure general education teachers and para-educators are properly trained to support special education students. [3.1.2 ensure the needs of all students](#)
- Provide more effective, centralized support for the curriculum, assessment, and evaluation. This should include targeted support for IB, STEM, Magnet, etc., which would enable schools to maintain their unique and high performing programs. [3.2.1 enacted curriculum](#)
- Create an organizational structure and district office job descriptions that accurately reflect the needs of the district. Staff in district positions should ensure that curriculum, instruction, and assessment policies and practices in all content areas are fully aligned with the Connecticut State Next Generation Accountability Report, which emphasizes student

achievement and growth on key indicators, such as SBAC, PSAT, and SAT. [3.4.1 personnel support](#)

- Building capacity at the district level and ensuring that the right people are in the right place to promote the implementation of effective strategies for English Language Learners.
- Ensure that there is a district wide understanding of what makes an effective coach, clearly define the coaching role, and expand the capacity of content area coaches to provide effective customized real-time instructional coaching to more teachers in their classrooms. [3.4.1 personnel support](#)
- Provide job-embedded professional development and coaching to address the identified needs of teachers and students. Ensure consistency in implementation of highly effective instructional strategies through monitoring student progress. Participation in PD is viewed as the most important factor in improving teaching and learning among Lighthouse Survey respondents. [3.4.2 PD to build capacity](#)
- Determine the effectiveness of the district's professional development policies and procedures, including early release Wednesdays, to ensure that all teachers have access to high quality professional development, delivered efficiently and effectively. [3.5.2 PD staff practices and student learning](#)

## 4 Domain 4: Engagement of Families and the Community

**Rating: Moderate Impact**

### Overview

The Office of Student Support and Special Programs as part of The Stamford Public Schools is responsible for coordinating student support services and initiatives on behalf of our students, families, and the community. These initiatives promote parent and student engagement, family learning and the Social Emotional Learning curriculum (SEL). These tools address the development, implementation and supervising alternate education programs. In addition, the Office of Student Support and Special Programs, in conjunction with the Office of Human Resources, facilitates recruitment & supervision of special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, school psychologists, social workers and guidance counselors.

### 4.1 Factors that Support District Engagement of Stakeholder Effectiveness

- The **public is invited to the monthly Board of Education meetings**, during which time is allotted for the “Public to be Heard.” A Citizen’s Budget Advisory Council meets each December to provide input into the Operating Budget for the subsequent school year. [4.1.1 two-way communication](#)
- SPS actively engages the community in problem-solving processes. The recently launched **United Way’s Stamford Cradle to Career (SC2C)** exemplifies this, where large numbers of community members work on implementation of the Strive Together Framework. A key element of the process involves asset mapping to provide information about the strengths and resources of the community, help uncover solutions, and promote community involvement, ownership, and empowerment. [4.1.2 community problem solving](#)
- **Parent associations** are established at each building and there is a thriving district group: The Parent Teacher Council of Stamford, CT (PT Council), made up of an Executive Board and a representative from each of the Stamford Public Schools. The PT Council provides workshops, leadership development, information, and programs; coordinates programs and projects of member units, and works to promote parent-teacher partnerships in the school district and wider community. School governance councils are also established in most of the schools. [4.1.3 productive partnerships](#)
- Although the district no longer has a large corporate sponsor, such as General Electric, there is nonetheless a wide range of **business and community partnerships** that support student learning across the district: [4.1.3 productive partnerships](#)
  - The City of Stamford partners with the Board of Education to provide Human Resources and Information Technology services.
  - Youth Services Bureau supports several activities including the recently launched Senior Internship program.
  - Stamford Public Education Foundation (SPEF) and other community partners are dedicated to helping SPS to achieve its mission, supporting students and families and closing the achievement gap through community collaboration and philanthropy.
  - Stamford High Gives Back facilitates a relationship with students and their families to foster a stronger learning environment.
  - Corporate and private partners, such as Building One Community Together and Stamford Invest Health, support and enrichment for student learning through grants, donations, and volunteerism, such as after-school activities, and

internships. These partnerships provide students with varied opportunities, both within and outside of the traditional classroom environment.

- An increasing number of community-based organizations (CBOs) work in partnership with elementary schools, such as the Chester Addison Community Center, to host regular school events. These organizations assist with coordination and transportation for family and community members to school functions. This is supported by feedback provided by community focus group meetings
- SPS has embedded **Parent Engagement Facilitators** (20 hours per week) in every school to serve as a bridge between parents and the schools. Parents, administrators, and teachers agree that the facilitators have begun to effectively address the needs of many struggling learners. [4.1.4 family awareness](#)
- The district has also installed a **language-line service** in every school, which enables administrators to access instant interpretation services. [4.1.4 family awareness](#)
- 11 Title I schools are required to have an annual Title I meeting **that informs parents** about Title I programming, the rights of Title I parents, Title I funding, curriculum, assessment, and academic proficiency, as well as school based parent involvement policies and school compacts. [4.1.4 family awareness](#)
- District leaders are cognizant of state and local politics and are proactive in responding to the impact that those **policies** may have on schools. [4.2.1 monitoring of policy](#)
- District leaders communicate and collaborate with agencies, organizations and other networks to ensure that the goals and the focus of the district are known. The district is connected to the networks of United Way STRIVE, CABE, Department of Justice Alliance District meetings. [4.2.2 engagement of networks and organizations](#)

## 4.2 Factors that Limit Stakeholder Engagement Effectiveness

- District wide expectations for **two-way engagement** of families and community that support the teaching, learning and transition of students at every level are not clear. [4.1.1 two-way engagement](#)
  - An SPS Concerns/Complaint form exists on the SPS website in the community section. It is unclear whether the community knows about the existence of this form, as very few come through the Superintendents or HR Director's office.
  - There are a few areas in place for feedback where feedback is actively solicited, such as the Parent Advisory Board to the Director of Special Education Services that meet monthly and encourage parents to guide, inform and analyze special education services. This opportunity for two-way engagement is not systemic in other areas.
  - Only a small percentage of families are actively engaged in school events that support positive outcomes for students.
  - The district and schools seldom use student and parent opinions as part of their self-evaluation process.
- Although family and community engagement is vital to academic success, there is significant **variation in the level of engagement from school to school**. For example, some parents from focus groups perceived that schools are "doing what they have always done", and also said that the district needs to focus on messaging to ensure it engages all members of the community. Focus groups perception indicated that there are not enough celebrations on what the district does well. [4.1.2 community problem solving](#)
- **Parent transportation difficulties:** Students are districted into schools from all parts of the city (i.e., families where children do not attend their neighborhood school as part of the district's +/- 10% integration standard), in some cases more than 20 minutes away from the school This distance makes it difficult for parents who rely on public transportation effectively

engage with school personnel face to face or attend school community events. It was mentioned in high school focus groups that the volume of parent participation is affected. [4.1.4 parent awareness](#)

- Not all parents may be aware of the educational and support options available due to a variety of languages (65) spoken in the homes of district families. With the increasing diversity of the population, the **number of languages** continues to multiply. Despite the language-line service in every school, there is often no member of school staff who can engage the parents in meaningful discussions in their home language. Purchase of a language line where a 3<sup>rd</sup> party service can translate via phone conference for the district website is a step in this direction, but does take personnel time to coordinate. [4.1.4 parent awareness](#)
- **Parent Engagement Facilitator (PEF) Support:** A parent engagement facilitator in every school is viewed as a very positive step; however, several stakeholders commented that, while the 20 hours is welcomed, the allocation is not differentiated based on the size, need, and location of the school. Comments in focus groups noted that PEF are used primarily for certain populations and translation services. Use of this position is inconsistent among buildings. There is limited data on the impact of parent facilitators. [4.1.4 parent awareness](#)

### 4.3 Recommendations for High Impact of Family and Community Engagement

- Establish, model and communicate district-wide expectations and best practices for schools for the two-way engagement of families and the community in support of learning and teaching and the transition of students at every stage of the education process. [4.1.1 two-way engagement](#)
- Ensure consistency and clarity in messaging across the district. Ensure stakeholders and leaders at schools understand the district vision and plans. Build cohesion across the district so that all stakeholders, including the growing Latino community, can work together and support each other. [4.1.1 two-way engagement](#)
- Ensure that families and community members have feedback and problem-solving opportunities throughout the district that are efficiently and effectively supported by human and fiscal resources. [4.1.2 community problem solving](#)
- Support the parent engagement facilitators to build plans with clear indicators that can be measured to ensure progress. Use team meetings as an effective community of practice and continuously identify gaps in skills, knowledge, and needs across the district to provide the necessary training and build the capacity for the team to be successful in their role. [4.1.4 parent awareness](#)
- Build on the emerging best practices, cited in factors that support district effectiveness, including the Stamford Cradle to Careers initiative, and asset mapping, to ensure that district becomes a beacon of best practice for cities, boards of education, school districts, and communities across the USA. [4.2.2 engagement of networks and organizations](#)

## 5 Domain 5: Human & Fiscal Resources

### Rating - Limited Evidence of Impact

#### Overview

Stamford educates over 16,000 students, and as of October 2016, employs a professional teaching staff (1,483), administrators (58), para professional staff (387) and school security staff (33), for a total of 1,961 staff members. There are additional employees within the labor jurisdiction of the city's HR department requiring continual dialogue: custodians (125), office support (77) and HR specialists (6), an additional 208 individuals. The SPS 2015-2016 Operating Budget of \$255.1 million is approximately 53% of the overall City of Stamford budget. The facilities budget is \$21 million and manages 25 different accounts. With its size of employees and operating budget come the substantial paperwork, propagating time sensitive issues and required efforts to maintain a smooth continuum, functional operation, fiscal compliance, community collaboration and well understood human resource and fiscal practices.

### 5.1 Human Resource Practices

#### 5.1.1 Human Resources Practices That Support District Effectiveness

- **SPS has established hiring process and practices 5.1.1 hiring practices**
  - Hiring managers check references and confirm that candidates have the necessary certifications
  - There are interview guidelines and processes in place for teachers and administrators
  - Positions are advertised in several locations and publications
- **There are internal opportunities to develop leadership skills 5.1.1 hiring practices**
  - Teacher leader full time positions (Currently 119), including administrative interns, curriculum associates/TOSAs, ISTs, SRBI support and developmental reading teachers
  - Other teacher leader positions (currently 169), including grade level leaders, elementary math liaisons, High school department heads and TPDL's
- **The district promotes staff retention 5.1.1 hiring practices**
  - Average teacher daily attendance rate for 2015-16 was 96%
  - Tuition reimbursement, comprehensive health and wellness benefits, technology skills training, Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program.
  - As of October 2016, 800 employees and retirees have attended well received Benefits/TRB, providing a more personalized approach.
  - HR does work with teachers in positive ways on tuition reimbursement, salary changes and child-care scholarships.
- **The district addresses staff diversity 5.1.1 hiring practices**
  - Percentage of all SPS employed minorities, both instructional and non-instructional, (currently 30.5%) is about 2X the state average
  - Currently establishing an Urban Teacher Task Force.
- **The HR department guides the use of the Connecticut state approved evaluation system. 5.1.2 state evaluation system**

#### 5.1.2 Human Resources Practices That Limit District Effectiveness

- **Attracting quality substitutes causes disruption in the educational environment. 5.1.1 hiring practices**

- The district has approximately 300 subs on record, with 150-250 working on a given day. At this capacity, there are many positions that “fail to fill”, thus requiring coverage at the school buildings.
- The substitute daily rate of pay (\$90) has not changed in at least 10 years.
- A sub handbook exists, but has not been updated in 10 years.
- **While the district student minority percentage has changed over the years (62% in 2009 to 69% in 2016), diversity of teaching staff has remained stable since 2009 (15% minority). [5.1.1 hiring practices](#)**
  - Administrators in focus groups were particularly concerned that the district was unable to attract enough high quality minority applicants to reflect the changing nature of the student population
  - Lack of diversity of school administrators (30%), was also raised as issues that limit academic and social emotional growth, both by some community members and parents in other focus group meetings
- **Effective process for hiring qualified staff is affected. [5.1.1 hiring practices](#)**
  - There is a rigorous Memorandum of Understanding with specified timelines that inhibits the offering contract to outside candidates in a timely fashion, leaving Stamford late in the timeline for hiring and missing highly qualified candidates.
- **Improvement is needed when allocating staff based on student need needs. [5.1.1 hiring practices](#)**
  - A concern was raised in a focus group meeting that not all schools are able to meet the IEP requirements for all students, due to lack of specialized staff at the individual school.
  - Administrators also report that there are many contractual constraints that hinder effective allocation of staff, including scheduling, collaterals, connection time and IDTs. In most cases, staff members are assigned by means of ratios and, in some cases, staff members are assigned per building, rather than by actual student need.
- **Teacher evaluation by administrators using the Professional Growth, Development, and Evaluation (PGDE) model, in its third year of implementation, is time consuming and confounding to professional growth, contributing to the inconsistency of teaching and learning quality across the district. [5.1.2 state evaluation system](#)**
  - Administrators report in focus groups that they do not believe the processes and procedures ensure the effective monitoring of learning.
  - Many teachers report in focus groups that they are not being provided with meaningful feedback, professional development, and coaching that is essential to enable them to systemically improve their professional practice.
  - Focus groups feel that the evaluation process does not enable administrators to hold all teachers accountable for the quality of learning and the level of student development outcomes in every classroom.
  - Focus groups perceive that the evaluation process protects poorly performing teachers.
- **The roles and responsibilities of many district positions are not clearly defined, nor do they always match the current needs of the district. [5.1.3 roles and responsibilities](#)**
  - Some job descriptions have not been revised for over 20 years.
  - There is some confusion between the roles under the Board of Education and those under the City of Stamford. Custodial, clerical and security employees work for the City.
  - Stakeholders perceive that some district staff carry overwhelming workloads or poorly aligned workloads. The district relies on TOSAs for all subject areas, except in math, where there is no district lead for this content work. One of the internal stakeholders summed up the current position by stating, “*people don’t know what they are responsible for*”.
  - This misalignment of job roles and practice makes it difficult for supervisors to evaluate the effectiveness of the district, and for central office administrators and school leaders to hold all staff accountable for student achievement and growth.

- **Collective bargaining of teachers union, reported by many stakeholders, including parents, limits effective systems to maintain a high quality work force.** [5.1.4 productive partnerships](#)
  - It was noted by focus groups that the union slows down the process of rewriting and posting job descriptions that aligns to district goals and student need.
  - There is a perception by focus groups that there are several areas that lack the staffing personnel to adequately and effectively conduct the work of the district.

## 5.2 Fiscal Resources Practices

### 5.2.1 Fiscal Resources Practices That Support District Effectiveness

- **The district has sound practices and measures in place that ensure fiscal probity to ensure sound financial management, including responses to audit requirements.** [5.2.1 financial systems](#)
  - A detailed budget-setting process
  - Strict accounting procedures
  - Regular financial updates to the board
  - Audits conducted regularly by the City of Stamford and CSDE with no significant findings
  - Overall expenditures per pupil costs fell below the state average in plant operation and maintenance, transportation, instructional supplies and equipment in 2014-2015.
- **Special education budgets are aligned with the program goals for over 1,800 students in part or full time special education programs.** [5.2.2 strategic financial allocation](#)
  - To provide appropriate instructional programs to all qualified students under IDEA
  - To provide the successful integration of students receiving IDEA services and in general education programs to general education staff.
- **The district promotes financial sustainability with grants to improve student outcomes.** [5.2.2 strategic financial allocation](#)
  - Connecticut State Alliance District program, which invests in Connecticut's 30 lowest-performing districts through Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding. As the sunsets after five years, SPS has transitioned some key staff to its operational budget.
  - Grant funded afterschool programs, such as Stamford's four 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center Grants, provide funding for high-need schools to implement scientifically based practices and support extended learning time.
- **Procedures are in place to maintain facilities and equipment for a conducive learning environment.** [5.2.3 facilities process](#)
  - Contracts are in place for maintenance
  - There are protocols for fire drills security systems were upgraded
  - District maintains a computer automated work order and preventative maintenance system (SchoolDude) that is updated daily and generates automatic orders to tradesmen

### 5.2.2 Fiscal Resources Practices That Limit District Effectiveness

- **The budget setting process and timetable means that SPS will be one of the last districts to confirm staffing requirements for the following school year.** This lag in the budgeting process reduces the pool of talent available to the district. [5.2.1 financial systems](#)
- **Budget constraints have an impact on several areas,** [5.2.2 strategic financial allocation](#) **including:**
  - Key senior leadership positions, such as an assistant superintendent for curriculum, a chief information officer, and additional staff in the research department to provide timely and accurate data to school leaders.

- Capital budget constraints – the district has identified a list of capital needs totaling more than 40 million, but the capital budget is set at 2 million.
- Increased staffing in programs such as IB will drive up budget.
- **Equitable and efficient allocation of struggling, special education and EL students is limited.** [5.2.2 strategic financial allocation](#)
  - Concern was raised in a focus group meeting that not all schools are able to meet the IEP requirements for all students, due to lack of specialized staff at the individual school.
  - In self-evaluation forms, it was perceived that staff is assigned per building, rather than by actual student need.
  - Administrators also report that there are many union contractual constraints that hinder effective allocation of staff, including scheduling, collaterals, connection time and IDTs.
  - In most cases, staff members are assigned by means of ratios and, in some cases, staff members are assigned per building, rather than by actual student need. There have been efforts to modify the allocation of resources based on student needs, using a weighted average. For example, Special Needs students (2) are weighted more than ELL (1.25) students, who are weighted more than General Education students (1). This process is emerging with the Special Education Budget Dashboard.
- **Issues relating to physical plant (heating, cooling, windows, window treatments, technology and Wi-Fi capability and availability) limit the attainment of 21st century skills.** Some buildings are over 100 years old, and some mechanical systems are over 55 years old. [5.2.3 facilities process](#)
- **Effective communication with custodial staff – to ensure that all requests made by certified staff or issues reported are not met with fidelity.** For many reasons, these communications are not always effective as the custodial staff members are under management of the City of Stamford, rather than the BOE, and create dissonance with management at the building level. Some challenges referenced included difficulty getting custodians to unlock doors as needed, and being unable to get basic repair work done in a timely manner because only one person/vendor is assigned to do each type of work for the entire district due to the union contract. It was also reported that acknowledgement of request for services and responses to calls and emails are inconsistent or ignored. [5.2.3 facilities process](#)

### 5.3 Recommendations for High Impact of Human and Fiscal Resources

- Increase effective practices and measures in place that ensure the recruitment, selection, hiring, assignment, promotion and retention of high quality personnel, especially in the areas of
  - Newly revised positions and job descriptions that align with district goals
  - Diverse teaching and administrative personnel
  - Substitutes [5.1.1 hiring practices](#)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the state-approved evaluation system of district school leaders, teachers and staff. [5.1.2 state evaluation system](#)
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities, skill sets, and expectations of all district staff that align with district goals to increase student achievement. [5.1.3 roles and responsibilities](#)
- Review and revise the budget-setting timeline. [5.2.1 financial systems](#)
- Ensure that the budget setting process focus is on equity of educational outcomes, rather than equality of inputs, to drive decision making. [5.2.2 strategic financial allocation](#)
- Examine strategic allocation and use of financial resources, ensuring equitable and efficient allocation of resources for struggling, special education, English language learners, and students with significant health and legal issues. [5.2.2 strategic financial allocation](#)

- Build effective communication systems between the contractor, head custodians, and school and district administrators. [5.2.3 facilities process](#)

## 6 Domain 6: Operational Systems

### Rating - Limited Evidence of Impact

#### Overview

The Stamford City Technology Department and Technology Management Services maintains and supports the current technology infrastructure and provides resources to support the educational experience. The department supports over 6,300 computers and 3,300 iPads in the school system.

The SPS District Operations Guide provides lead contact information as well as key programs and functions in the areas of C&I, ELL, facilities, finance, food services, grants, human resources, information systems and technology, literacy, mathematics, family and community engagement, public affairs, research, safety and security, school improvement and professional development, science, social studies, special education, student support and special programs and world languages. Operational decisions are made through cabinet, garnered from the teachers and administrative unions. Some operational matters are tested or piloted.

### 6.1 Operational Systems Practices That Support Effectiveness

#### 6.1.1 IT and Data Systems

- The City of Stamford IT workers, who share a responsibility with the BoE for IT services across the school district, are responsive to the schools and there is a solid working relationship with the department. [6.1.1 stakeholder IT needs](#)
- The district has an Acceptable Use of the Internet and Internet Safety Policy that was recently revised and approved by the board in August 2016. [6.1.1 data systems](#) [6.1.1 stakeholder IT needs](#)
- The research department provides a wide range of customized reports to assist the Board of Education, district, and school leaders in their decision-making process. [6.1.1 stakeholder IT](#)
- Curriculum Associate for Technology manages and provides technology training for such applications as EZTraxx, Frontline General Applicant and Job Posting Management, HTE, Info snap (online registration and lottery application portal), Kronos, Parentlink, Power School, TIDE Smarter Balanced and CMT/CAPT Online Test Administration. [6.1.2 IT capacity](#)
- 23 Technology Professional Development Leaders (TPDLs) serve as a facilitator for school-based technology training and integration in areas such as Smarter Balanced Assessments and Chromebook carts. TPDLs meet monthly with the central office to discuss progress on Technology plan goals. [6.1.2 IT capacity](#)
- The district is in year 2 of its three-year Technology Plan. A technology plan status report with comments on tasks on each of the five goals: engaging and empowering learning experiences, assessment, connected teaching and learning, infrastructure for teaching and learning, productivity, and efficiency. [6.1.2 IT capacity](#)
- Teachers are increasing their use of technology for instructional purposes. Nearly every classroom has an interactive whiteboard, most English classes have document cameras, and all schools have computer labs—each elementary school has 2 labs. There are Technology Professional Development Leaders that support technology integration in the schools. Use of technology is part of the teacher evaluation process. [6.1.2 IT capacity](#)

### 6.1.2 Communications

The Office of Public Affairs communicates key information in a timely way to board members, staff, parents, and the community [6.2.2 timely communication](#)

- Emergency communications protocol is outlined in the District Operations Guide and these communications are sent by building administration via phone call through an outbound notification system as soon as possible.
- Building administration: emergency templates to building administrators (such as arrest of staff member, lockdown, bed bug protocol, bus accidents, etc.). A written protocol for incident communication for a staff or student incident ease
- Press releases: distributed to all staff, media contacts and BOE, which include high profile appointments, grants, academic and extracurricular awards, budget issues voted on by the BOE, district sponsored major events, such as a hackathon or budget hearing.
- Community groups: flyers and announcements from faith based leaders, elected officials, community leaders, community service groups, Latino community leaders, local businesses and neighborhood associations through Peach Jar press release.

### 6.1.3 Operations

- The district The SPS budget book defines district and department goals. [6.3.1 goal alignment](#)
- Long term capital projects have been identified and funds allocated to fix, repair, and repurpose current configurations. [6.3.2 operational infrastructure](#)
- The department of Grants and Funded Programs also proactively supports multiple grant applications every year. Grants provide funding to allow initiatives to take place (learning commons, college and career readiness programs and support, chrome book carts for classroom use). [6.3.2 operational infrastructure](#)

## 6.2 Operational Systems Practices That Limit District Effectiveness

### 6.2.1 IT and Data Systems

- The Chief Information Officer responsibilities are managed by a consultant. [6.1.2 IT communication by key personnel](#)
- Limited access and training on quality data to improve instruction: Although the research team produces a range of reports to support the decision-making processes of administrators, the current data systems do not provide teachers and other staff with easy access to classroom and student data in a timely and user-friendly format. Some teachers are not trained to use the new data management system, or they cannot use it effectively to collect and analyze student data. [6.1.2IT communication by key personnel](#)

### 6.2.2 Communication

- Evidence of two-way communications system with all stakeholders all areas of the district is limited. [6.2.1 two-way communication](#)
- Focus group perceptions noted inter district communication issues concerning transportation, custodial compliance, third party facilities management, city employees, and special education. [6.2.1 two-way communication](#)
- Evidence of systems, processes, and procedures around use of data that are differentiated by department is limited. Focus groups reported inconsistency of receiving relevant data in a timely fashion. [6.2.2 timely communication](#)

### 6.2.3 Operations

- **Many of the operations rely on individuals as opposed to documented and effective operational systems.** This reliance on individuals rather than systems permeates all levels of district work and creates unnecessary barriers to improving student outcomes. [6.3.2 operational infrastructure](#)
- **There are limited systems in place to promote or guide cross-functional work** or any other standards to monitor operational systems. The district does not have a process for evaluating its operational and infrastructure systems within schools and the district. Dashboard reports on departments, such as transportation, food services, benefits, safety and security, need to be developed. Bureaucratic processes are barriers to the funding and allocation of resources. A process for technology renewal was recently put into place. Unfortunately, funding was cut, which impedes this process. [6.3.3 alignment of HR and fiscal resources to student need](#)

## 6.3 Recommendations for High Impact of Operational Systems

- Ensure that IT and data systems serve stakeholders effectively and efficiently. [6.1.1 data systems](#)
- Enhance the IT and research teams so that they can provide additional guidance and recommendations on effectively using data and technology. [6.1.2 lead people for IT](#)
- Ensure that lead people for IT and data communicate regularly with schools and district staff to ensure effective use of resources. [6.1.3 IT communication](#)
- Facilitate two-way communication with each stakeholder so that needs are met in a timely manner. For example, the Press Office can only publicize events, especially at school level, if it has the information well in advance. [6.2.1 efficient two-way communication](#)
- As the new district data-dashboard is rolled out, ensure that systems are put in to place to collect relevant information and data and ensure that all staff and board members are trained, so that everyone has access to the data they need, when they need it. [6.2.2 timely communication](#)
- Create systems in which all stakeholders receive and provide relevant information in a timely manner. Ensure messaging is easy to understand, translated as needed, and the appropriate audiences are reached. [6.2.2 timely communication](#)
- Ensure that all operational systems align with the district's values, vision and goals. [6.3.1 goal alignment](#)
- Develop a process for regularly checking the effectiveness of its operational and infrastructure systems. [6.3.2 operational infrastructure](#)
- Align human and fiscal resources with the needs of student services, facilities and safety and security systems. [6.3.3 alignment of HR and fiscal resources to student need](#)

## 7 Scoring Process and Grade Summary

Six over-arching domains frame the District Quality Review, with clusters of criteria beneath each domain. Each individual criterion, as well as the overall domain, are evaluated against the four “levels” of performance described below.

When making judgments using the four-point scale, the DQR Reviewers referred to the illustrative “evidence descriptors” in the *Stamford DQR Criteria & Rubric* document. The rubric contains evidence descriptors for levels “4” (“high impact”) and “2” (“limited evidence of impact”). On any given criterion, where SPS exceeded level “2” but did not meet level “4,” it was scored as a “3” (“moderate impact”). Where SPS did not meet level “2,” it was scored as a “1” (“low or lack of impact”).

Score	Level
4	High Impact
3	Moderate Impact
2	Limited Evidence of Impact
1	Low or Lack of Impact

**4. High Impact** The system is consistently providing effective, efficient, and high quality service and support of schools in this domain meets and/or exceeds the stated benchmarks which are having a positive impact on the experiences of all students. Few if any weaknesses are present and none that would negatively affect student learning. In addition to having provided this level for at least three years, the district continues to proactively improve its performance and serve as a benchmark for other school districts. The district is engaged in cycles of continuous monitoring and improvement, and has proactively identified opportunities for improvement which are having a high impact on district performance in this domain.

**3. Moderate Impact** The system is providing effective service for schools across most components or elements in the domain. Few weaknesses are present and none have significant negative impact on student learning overall. While much of the components or elements in this domain are strong, there are important areas that need improvement for at least some schools.

**2. Limited Evidence of Impact** The system has met minimal standards of service and support of schools in this domain; however, there are limits and some weaknesses individually or collectively affect the learning experience of students. There are strengths; however, the system needs targeted action or intervention to reduce the negative effect on student learning experiences. The system may need intervention to engage in proactive cycles of improvement. Targeted intervention and focused performance coaching may be needed for individuals and teams.

**1. Low or Lack of Impact** The system is characterized by significant dysfunctional practices, or gaps in provision of services and supports that negatively impact school quality and diminish the learning experiences of students. Immediate remedial intervention is required if the performance in this domain is to become an asset rather than a liability for overall system performance. Staff responsible for this domain will likely need peer coaching and benchmark experience so that staff can see and understand what acceptable performance looks like.

**Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes**

**1 2 3 4**

**The extent to which...**

<b>1.1 Academic Achievement</b>					
1.1.1	All schools in the district are showing continual academic growth and meeting high academic standards		2		
1.1.2	The district is meeting and/or exceeding state or national level academic achievement expectations.		2		
1.1.3	Achievement gaps between subgroups of students within the district are closed or closing rapidly.		2		
1.1.4	Students with disabilities (SWD) and English language learners (ELL), Gifted and Talented (G & T) are well supported and meet/exceed high academic standards.		2		
<b>1.2 Personal and social achievement</b>					
1.2.1	District leaders ensure that all schools provide a learning environment that promotes the personal, social, and emotional development of students.		2		
1.2.2	The district has established expectations and puts human and fiscal resources in place to ensure all students receive access to high quality personal and academic achievement at all schools		2		
<b>Overall outcome of Domain 1</b>			<b>2</b>		

**Domain 2: Leadership & Management**

1 2 3 4

**The extent to which...**

<b>2.1 Vision and Culture</b>					
2.1.1	District leaders model and promote shared values of high expectations that all students can achieve at high levels.			3	
2.1.2	The district has a clear and well-focused vision underpinning everything it does, that has been developed collaboratively with stakeholders	1			
<b>2.2 Strategic Planning, Plan Management and Use of Data</b>					
2.2.1	District leaders empower leaders at all levels to implement the actions needed to achieve the district's goals with the flexibility to appropriately address actions based on the school's focus and goals (e.g. IB, Early Childhood, Magnet models etc.).		2		
2.2.2	The district has established and communicated widely challenging but attainable district improvement goals for the short, medium, and long term.		2		
2.2.3	Data-informed systems are in place that focus the operations and human and financial resource decisions of the district to ensure higher levels of student learning and staff effectiveness.		2		
<b>2.3 Governance</b>					
2.3.1	District leaders, including School Committee or School Board of Education (BOE), create and adhere to policies, procedures, and budgets that support a shared vision by all stakeholders and promote high expectations for learning and teaching in all schools.		2		
2.3.2	BOE members are well prepared and informed to guide and support the work of the district and work collaboratively with the superintendent, in part by effectively advocating for the district and creating a culture that is conducive to public support for the district.		2		
<b>2.4 Accountability</b>					
2.4.1	There are clear systems of accountability for all departments, teams, and schools. These systems are appropriately varied in response to individual school philosophy, achievement and goals including IB, Early Childhood, and Magnet.		2		
<b>2.5 Professional Capacity of Office Staff</b>					
2.5.1	The district's central office structure enables efficient and effective communication, leadership, and management to support learning and teaching.		2		
2.6.2	District leadership models respectful interactions among the district level staff and school level staff			3	
<b>Overall outcome of Domain 2</b>			2		

## Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...					
<b>3.1 Learning and Teaching</b>					
3.1.1	The district has a vision for effective learning and teaching, and ensures that all students are taught a rigorous and relevant core curriculum, enabling students to achieve high academic standards.		2		
3.1.2	The district implements practices that ensure the needs of all students, including students with disabilities (SWD), English Learners (EL), Gifted and Talented (G&T) are met by dedicating the necessary human and fiscal resources, to facilitate high quality learning and teaching.		2		
<b>3.2 Curriculum</b>					
3.2.1	The enacted curriculum facilitates success for students and is aligned to the schools' structures (e.g. International Baccalaureate, magnet models, etc.).		2		
3.2.2	The district uses its resources strategically to provide a coherent, rigorous curriculum, aligned to the agreed federal, state and industry standards, that covers all grades and subjects and is model of best practice.		2		
3.2.3	The district ensures that the curriculum provides a broad range of relevant experiences to interest, motivate, and excite students.		2		
<b>3.3 Assessment and Use of Data</b>					
3.3.1	The district has systems and policies in place to ensure that school administrators and teachers receive and can use data in a timely manner.		2		
3.3.2	The district has systems in place for collecting and using student data and other formative data for the modification of instruction to improve student achievement.		2		
3.3.3	The district has systems in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of school programs and assist schools in making modifications where needed.		2		
3.3.4	The district ensures that data teams at district and school level make effective use of assessment data to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom.		2		
<b>3.4 Instructional Leadership and Capacity</b>					
3.4.1	The district uses its human and fiscal resources effectively to support schools in the selection, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of effective strategies, programs, and innovations to improve student learning outcomes.		2		
3.4.2	The district provides professional development, training, support, and coaching that develops the capacity of school leaders at all levels.		2		
<b>3.5 Professional Development</b>					
3.5.1	The district uses its resources efficiently and effectively to provide professional development and learning opportunities sufficiently flexible and aligned with district and school goals (e.g. IB, Early Childhood, magnet models etc.).		2		
3.5.2	The district provides professional learning that is relevant and addresses adult and student needs and assesses the impact on staff practices and student learning to make adjustments as needed.		2		
<b>Overall outcome of Domain 3</b>			<b>2</b>		



**Domain 4: Engagement of Families**

1 2 3 4

**The extent to which...**

<b>4.1 Families and the Community</b>					
4.1.1	The district establishes, models, and communicates district-wide expectations and best practices for schools for the two-way engagement of families and the community in support of learning and teaching and the transition of students at every stage of the education process.			3	
4.1.2	Families and community members have feedback and problem-solving opportunities throughout the district that are efficiently and effectively supported by human and fiscal resources.		2		
4.1.3	The district develops and maintains productive partnerships with the business, philanthropic, higher education, faith, and non-profit communities, that prepares students for higher education and success in the 21st century.			3	
4.1.4	Parents and families are aware of the educational and support options and choices available to them and their children.			3	
<b>4.2 Political Engagement and Policy Alignment</b>					
4.2.1	District leaders monitor state and local political policies and issues to determine the impact on district school, and respond appropriately.			3	
4.2.2	District leaders communicate and collaborate with agencies, organizations, and other networks to ensure that the goals and focus of the district are known and considered when political decisions are made		2		
<b>Overall outcome of Domain 4</b>				3	

**Domain 5: Human & Fiscal Resources**

**1 2 3 4**

**The extent to which...**

<b>5.1 Human Resources</b>					
5.1.1	The district has practices and measures in place that ensure the recruitment, selection, hiring, assignment, promotion and retention of high quality district office and school level personnel, including addressing the need for enhanced diversify.		2		
5.1.2	The district guides and monitors the use of state-approved evaluation system (if applicable) to ensure fidelity of implementation and to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of district and school leaders, teachers, and staff.		2		
5.1.3	The district clearly defines the roles and responsibilities, skill sets, and expectations of all district staff.		2		
5.1.4	The district has productive partnerships with unions and other employee groups that ensure effective systems to maintain a high quality work force		2		
<b>5.2 Fiscal Resources</b>					
5.2.1	The district has practices and measures in place that ensure fiscal probity and promote data- driven decision making.			3	
5.2.2	The district is strategic in its allocation and use of financial resources, ensuring equitable and efficient allocation of resources for struggling, special education, English language learners, and students with significant health and legal issues.			3	
5.2.3	The district implements processes to maintain facilities and equipment and ensure an environment that is safe and conducive to learning.		2		
<b>Overall outcome of Domain 5</b>			<b>2</b>		

**Domain 6: Operational Systems**

1 2 3 4

**The extent to which...**

<b>6.1 IT and Data Support</b>					
6.1.1	The district, in partnership with the City, ensures that IT and data systems serve schools, district, and stakeholder needs effectively and efficiently.		2		
6.1.2	The district builds capacity in schools and the central office for personnel to make effective use of technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness to support students' learning.		2		
6.1.3	The district ensures that lead people for IT and data communicate regularly with schools and district staff to ensure effective use of resources			3	
<b>6.2 Communications</b>					
6.2.1	The district has an effective strategy for efficient two-way communication with parents, employees, stakeholders, media, and the public.			3	
6.2.2	The district communicates key information in a timely way to specific audiences.		2		
<b>6.2 Operations</b>					
6.3.1	The district ensures that all operational systems align with its values, vision, and goals.		2		
6.3.2	The district has a process for regularly checking the efficiency and effectiveness of its operational and infrastructure systems.		2		
6.3.3	The district aligns human and fiscal resources with the needs of student services, facilities, and safety and security systems.		2		
<b>Overall outcome of Domain 6</b>			2		